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Aruba: The island of Aloes



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Biden is giving the 2nd highest civilian award to the leaders of the Jan. 6 congressional committee

By COLLEEN LONG

Associated Press

President Joe Biden is bestowing the second highest civilian medal on Liz Cheney and Bennie Thompson, leaders of the congressional investigation into the Capitol riot who Donald Trump has said should be jailed for their roles in the inquiry.

Biden will award the Presidential Citizens Medal to 20 people in a ceremony Thursday at the White House, including Americans who fought for marriage equality, a pioneer in treating wounded soldiers, and two of the president's longtime friends, former Sens. Ted Kaufman, D-Del., and Chris Dodd, D-Conn.

"President Biden believes these Americans are bonded by their common decency and commitment to serving others," the White House said in a statement. "The country is better because of their dedication and sacrifice."

Biden last year honored people who were involved in defending the Capitol from a mob of angry Trump supporters on Jan. 6, 2021, or who helped safeguard the will of American voters during the 2020 presidential election, when Trump tried and failed to overturn the results.

Cheney, a former Wyo-



This combo photo shows Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, D-Miss., speaking during the Democratic National Convention on Wednesday, Aug. 21, 2024, in Chicago, left; and Former Republican Congresswoman Liz Cheney speaking during a town hall with Democratic presidential nominee Vice President Kamala Harris at The People's Light in Malvern, Pa., Monday, Oct. 21, 2024, right.

Associated Press

oming congresswoman, and Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat, led the House committee that investigated the insurrection. The committee's final report asserted that Trump criminally engaged in a "multi-part conspiracy" to overturn the lawful results of the election he lost to Biden and failed to act to stop his supporters from attacking

the Capitol. Thompson wrote that Trump "lit that fire." Cheney, who lost her seat in the GOP primary in August, later said she would vote for Democrat Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential race and campaigned with the Democratic nominee, raising Trump's ire. Biden has been considering whether to offer preemptive pardons to

Cheney and others Trump has targeted. Trump, who won the 2024 election and will take office Jan. 20, still refuses to back away from his lies about the 2020 presidential race and has said he would pardon the rioters once he is back in the White House. During an interview with NBC's "Meet the Press," the

president-elect said that "Cheney did something that's inexcusable, along with Thompson and the people on the un-select committee of political thugs and, you know, creeps," claiming without evidence they "deleted and destroyed" testimony they collected.

"Honestly, they should go to jail," he said.

Cheney and Thompson were "an embarrassment to this country" for their conduct on the committee, Trump's communications director Steven Cheung asserted. Biden is also giving the award to attorney Mary Bonauto, who fought to legalize same-sex marriage, and Evan Wolfson, a leader of the marriage equality movement.

Other honorees include Frank Butler, who set new standards for using tourniquets on war injuries; Diane Carlson Evans, an Army nurse during the Vietnam War who founded the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation; and Eleanor Smeal, an activist who led women's rights protests in the 1970s and fought for equal pay. He's also giving the award to photographer Bobby Sager, academics Thomas Vallely and Paula Wallace, and Frances Visco, the president of the National Breast Cancer Coalition. □



An abortion-rights activist holds a box of mifepristone pills as demonstrators from both anti-abortion and abortion-rights groups rally outside the Supreme Court in Washington, Tuesday, March 26, 2024.

Associated Press

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chief Justice John Roberts issued a defense Tuesday of judicial independence, which

he said is under threat from intimidation, disinformation and the prospect of public officials defying court orders. Roberts laid out his concerns in his annual report on the

Chief Justice John Roberts defends judicial independence, says it is under threat in several ways

federal judiciary. It was released after a year where the nation's court system was unusually enmeshed in a closely fought presidential race, with then-Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump assailing the integrity of judges who ruled against him as he faced criminal charges for which he denied wrongdoing. Trump won the race following a landmark Supreme Court immunity decision penned by Roberts that, along with another high court decision halting efforts to disqualify him from the ballot, removed obstacles

to his election. The immunity decision was criticized by Democrats like President Joe Biden, who later called for term limits and an enforceable ethics code following criticism over undisclosed trips and gifts from wealthy benefactors to some justices. Roberts, for his part, introduced his letter by recounting a story about King George III stripping colonial judges of lifetime appointments, an order that was "not well received."

Trump is now readying for a second term as president with an ambitious conservative

agenda, elements of which are likely to be legally challenged and end up before the court whose conservative majority includes three justices appointed by Trump during his first term.

Roberts and Trump clashed in 2018 when the chief justice rebuked the president for denouncing a judge who rejected his migrant asylum policy as an "Obama judge." In 2020, Roberts criticized comments made by Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer while the Supreme Court was considering a high-profile abortion case. □

5 things we know and still don't know about COVID, 5 years after it appeared

By **LAURAN NEERGAARD, LAURA UNGAR and MIKE STOBBE**

Associated Press

Five years ago, a cluster of people in Wuhan, China, fell sick with a virus never before seen in the world.

The germ didn't have a name, nor did the illness it would cause. It wound up setting off a pandemic that exposed deep inequities in the global health system and reshaped public opinion about how to control deadly emerging viruses.

The virus is still with us, though humanity has built up immunity through vaccinations and infections. It's less deadly than it was in the pandemic's early days and it no longer tops the list of leading causes of death. But the virus is evolving, meaning scientists must track it closely.

Where did the SARS-CoV-2 virus come from?

We don't know. Scientists think the most likely scenario is that it circulated in bats, like many coronaviruses. They think it then infected another species, probably racoon dogs, civet cats or bamboo rats, which in turn infected humans handling or butchering those animals at a market in Wuhan, where the first human cases appeared in late November 2019.

That's a known pathway for disease transmission and likely triggered the first epidemic of a similar virus, known as SARS. But this theory has not been proven for the virus that causes COVID-19. Wuhan is



Cemetery workers in protective gear bury a person alongside rows of freshly dug graves at the Vila Formosa cemetery in Sao Paulo, Brazil, April 1, 2020.

Associated Press

home to several research labs involved in collecting and studying coronaviruses, fueling debate over whether the virus instead may have leaked from one.

It's a difficult scientific puzzle to crack in the best of circumstances. The effort has been made even more challenging by political sniping around the virus' origins and by what international researchers say are moves by China to withhold evidence that could help.

The true origin of the pandemic may not be known for many years — if ever.

How many people died from COVID-19?

Probably more than 20 million. The World Health Organization has said member countries reported more

than 7 million deaths from COVID-19 but the true death toll is estimated to be at least three times higher.

In the U.S., an average of about 900 people a week have died of COVID-19 over the past year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The coronavirus continues to affect older adults the most. Last winter in the U.S., people age 75 and older accounted for about half the nation's COVID-19 hospitalizations and in-hospital deaths, according to the CDC.

"We cannot talk about COVID in the past, since it's still with us," WHO director Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

What vaccines were made available?

Scientists and vaccine-makers

broke speed records developing COVID-19 vaccines that have saved tens of millions of lives worldwide — and were the critical step to getting life back to normal.

Less than a year after China identified the virus, health authorities in the U.S. and Britain cleared vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna. Years of earlier research — including Nobel-winning discoveries that were key to making the new technology work — gave a head start for so-called mRNA vaccines.

Today, there's also a more traditional vaccine made by Novavax, and some countries have tried additional options. Rollout to poorer countries was slow but the WHO estimates more than 13 billion doses of COVID-19

vaccines have been administered globally since 2021. The vaccines aren't perfect. They do a good job of preventing severe disease, hospitalization and death, and have proven very safe, with only rare serious side effects. But protection against milder infection begins to wane after a few months.

Like flu vaccines, COVID-19 shots must be updated regularly to match the ever-evolving virus — contributing to public frustration at the need for repeated vaccinations. Efforts to develop next-generation vaccines are underway, such as nasal vaccines that researchers hope might do a better job of blocking infection.

Which variant is dominating now?

Genetic changes called mutations happen as viruses make copies of themselves. And this virus has proven to be no different.

Scientists named these variants after Greek letters: alpha, beta, gamma, delta and omicron. Delta, which became dominant in the U.S. in June 2021, raised a lot of concerns because it was twice as likely to lead to hospitalization as the first version of the virus.

Then in late November 2021, a new variant came on the scene: omicron.

"It spread very rapidly," dominating within weeks, said Dr. Wesley Long, a pathologist at Houston Methodist in Texas. "It drove a huge spike in cases compared to anything we had seen previously." □

A data company has figured out which airlines fly on time most often

By The Associated Press

Mexican airline Aeromexico had the world's best record for on-time arrivals in 2024, according to an annual ranking released Thursday. Delta Air Lines scored the highest among U.S. carriers despite a computer outage that caused thousands of flight cancellations in July. Aviation-data provider Cirium said in a report that nearly 87% of Aeromexico flights arrived within 15 minutes of their scheduled arrival, a widely used measure of on-

time performance among airlines.

Saudia, the flagship carrier of Saudi Arabia, ranked second worldwide, with an on-time performance rate of just over 86%, according to Cirium. Cirium has rated airlines for timeliness for 16 years. CEO Jeremy Bowen said 2024 was a difficult year for airlines due to severe weather patterns and the summer technology outage. The winning airlines therefore deserved credit for getting most passengers to their destinations on time,

Bowen said.

Atlanta-based Delta achieved an on-time rate of more than 83%, good enough to rank third worldwide. The next-best U.S. carriers were United Airlines, at nearly 81%, and Alaska Airlines, at just over 79%, Cirium said.

Canada's WestJet, Air Canada and Denver-based budget airline Frontier finished at the bottom of the pack among U.S. and Canadian carriers, with on-time ratings below 72%.



An AeroMexico plane taxis on the tarmac of the Benito Juarez International Airport in Mexico City, May 12, 2022.

Other regional winners around the globe, according to Cirium, were Japan Airlines, low-cost Spanish

carrier Iberia Express, Panama's Copa Airlines, and South African low-cost carrier FlySafair. □

Man shot himself in head before Cybertruck exploded outside Trump's Las Vegas hotel, officials say

By TARA COPP, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, COLLEEN LONG and TY ONEIL

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The highly decorated Army soldier inside the Tesla Cybertruck that burst into flames outside President-elect Donald Trump's Las Vegas hotel shot himself in the head before the explosion and likely planned to cause more damage but the explosive was rudimentary and the steel-sided vehicle absorbed much of the force, officials said Thursday.

Clark County Sheriff Kevin McMahon said at a news conference that a handgun was found at the feet of the man in the driver's seat, who officials believe is Matthew Livelsberger, 37, of Colorado. The shot appeared to be self-inflicted, officials said.

Damage from the blast was mostly limited to the interior of the truck. The explosion "vented out and up" and didn't hit the Trump hotel doors just a few feet away, the sheriff said. "The level of sophistication is not what we would expect from an individual with this type of military experience," said Kenny Cooper, a special agent in charge for the the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Among other charred items found inside the truck were a second firearm, a number of fireworks, a passport, a military ID, credit cards, an iPhone and a smartwatch, McMahon said. Authorities said both



This image provided by Alcides Antunes shows a Tesla Cybertruck that exploded outside President-elect Donald Trump's Las Vegas hotel early Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2025.

Associated Press

guns were purchased legally. Investigators have not definitively identified the remains as Livelsberger, but the IDs and tattoos on the body "give a strong indication that it's him," the sheriff said.

Livelsberger served in the Green Berets, highly trained special forces who work to counter terrorism abroad and train partners, the Army said in a statement. He had served in the Army since 2006, rising through the ranks with a long career of overseas assignments, deploying twice to Afghanistan and serving in Ukraine, Tajikistan, Georgia and Congo, the Army said. He was awarded two Bronze Stars, including one with a

valor device for courage under fire, a combat infantry badge and an Army Commendation Medal with valor. Livelsberger was on approved leave when he died, according to the statement. McMahon said Livelsberger rented the Tesla electric vehicle in Denver on Saturday and the sheriff displayed a map showing that it was charged in the Colorado town of Monument near Colorado Springs on Monday. On New Year's Eve, it was charged in Trinidad, Colorado, and the towns of Las Vegas, Albuquerque and Gallup in New Mexico, along the Interstate 40 corridor. Then on Wednesday, the

day of the explosion, it was charged in the Arizona towns of Holbrook, Flagstaff and Kingman before video showed it on the Las Vegas Strip about 7:30 a.m.

The FBI said Thursday in a post on X that it was "conducting law enforcement activity" at a home in Colorado Springs related to Wednesday's explosion but provided no other details. The explosion of the truck, packed with fireworks mortars and camp fuel canisters, came hours after 42-year-old Shamsud-Din Bahar Jabbar rammed a truck into a crowd in New Orleans' famed French Quarter early on New Year's Day, killing at least 15 people before be-

ing shot to death by police. That crash was being investigated as a terrorist attack. The FBI said Thursday that they believe Jabbar acted alone, reversing its position from a day earlier that he likely worked with others. Both Livelsberger and Jabbar spent time at the base formerly known as Fort Bragg, a massive Army base in North Carolina that is home to multiple Army special operations units. However, one of the officials who spoke to the AP said there is no overlap in their assignments at the base, now called Fort Liberty. Chris Raia, FBI deputy assistant director, said Thursday that officials have found 'no definitive link' between the New Orleans attack and the truck explosion in Las Vegas. Seven people nearby suffered minor injuries when the Tesla truck exploded. Video showed a tumble of charred fireworks mortars, canisters and other explosive devices crowded into the back of the pickup. The truck bed walls were still intact because the blast shot straight up rather than to the sides.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk said Wednesday afternoon on X that "we have now confirmed that the explosion was caused by very large fireworks and/or a bomb carried in the bed of the rented Cybertruck and is unrelated to the vehicle itself."

"All vehicle telemetry was positive at the time of the explosion," Musk wrote. □



A roll of police tape is left on the windshield of a Los Angeles County sheriff's vehicle in the parking lot of its training academy in Whittier, Calif., Nov. 16, 2022.

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The archaic computer dispatch system for the nation's larg-

est sheriff's department remained out of commission on Thursday after crashing

Deputies are stuck using radios with Los Angeles County's dispatch system out of commission

on New Year's Eve, forcing deputies to handle all calls by radio, authorities said.

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department officials first learned about the problem around 8 p.m. Tuesday, when deputies at several sheriff's stations were unable to log in to the mobile computers in their patrol cars, the department said in a statement.

The department said its computer-aided dispatch program — known as the CAD — was "not allowing

personnel to log on with the new year, making the CAD inoperable."

"As a result, the Department is currently operating on self-dispatch while the issue is being addressed. Calls for service are still being responded to and are being manually tracked at the station level," the statement said.

Service remains uninterrupted and radio communications and 911 lines are fully operational, officials said.

The department has faced challenges with outdated technology for years. Since taking office in December 2022, Sheriff Robert Luna has "emphasized the urgent need to improve and upgrade our internal systems."

In mid-2023, the department formally requested proposals to acquire a new, centralized CAD system. This week's statements haven't said where the modernization effort stands. □

Israeli airstrike hits a Gaza humanitarian zone as Netanyahu OKs a delegation to talks in Qatar

By WAFAA SHURAF and
FATMA KHALED
Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes killed at least 26 people across the Gaza Strip on Thursday, hitting Hamas security officers and an Israeli-declared humanitarian zone.

As the daily bombardment continued, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he had authorized a delegation from the Mossad intelligence agency, the Shin Bet internal security agency and the military to continue negotiations in Qatar toward a ceasefire deal. Israeli media said the delegation would depart Friday.

There was no immediate Hamas comment. The U.S.-led talks have repeatedly stalled. The Israeli strike in the seaside humanitarian zone known as Muwasi occurred as hundreds of thousands of displaced people are huddling there in damp winter weather.

"Everyone was taking shelter in their tents from the cold, and suddenly we found the world turning upside down. Why, and for what?" said Ziyad Abu Jabal, displaced from Gaza City.

The early morning strike killed at least 10 people, including three children and two senior Hamas police officers.

Israel's military said it targeted a senior officer in the Hamas-run police force.



A destroyed part of Gaza City as seen from southern Israel, Thursday Jan. 2, 2025.

Associated Press

It said he was involved in gathering intelligence used by Hamas' armed wing in attacks on Israeli forces.

Another Israeli strike killed at least eight Palestinians in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza. The men were members of local committees that help secure aid convoys, according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies. An Associated Press reporter there confirmed the toll.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military on the strike.

In southern Gaza, Israel's military killed five policemen in eastern Khan Younis. Israeli government spokesman

David Mencer said the strike targeted the head of the Hamas internal security force in southern Gaza.

"Where did we find him? Where else, but of course hiding in the humanitarian zone in Khan Younis, where Gazans are sheltering from this war," Mencer said.

Israel has repeatedly targeted the police in Gaza during 15 months of war, contributing to a breakdown of law and order in the territory that has made it difficult for humanitarian groups to deliver aid. Israel accuses the militant Hamas group of hijacking aid for its own purposes. The Hamas-run government

had a police force numbering in the tens of thousands that maintained a high degree of public security before the war, while also violently suppressing dissent. Now officers have largely vanished from the streets in many areas. Meanwhile, three Palestinians were killed in an Israeli strike that hit a group of people walking in the street in Maghazi in central Gaza. Their bodies were taken to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. The war was sparked by Hamas-led militants' Oct. 7, 2023 attack into Israel. The militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250.

Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third believed to be dead.

Israel's offensive in retaliation has killed over 45,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to the territory's Health Ministry, which says women and children make up more than half the dead. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in their tally.

Israel's military says it only targets militants and blames Hamas for civilian deaths because its fighters operate in dense residential areas. The army says it has killed 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has caused widespread destruction and displaced some 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, many of them multiple times. Hunger is widespread. Children, some barefoot or in sandals, waited in line with metal pails or other containers at a food distribution center in Deir al-Balah on Thursday.

Netanyahu leaves the hospital after surgery.

Doctors at Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital said Netanyahu was recuperating well, although he has a period of recovery ahead. Despite doctor's orders to remain hospitalized, the 75-year-old leader briefly left the facility to participate in a vote in Israel's parliament on Tuesday. □

'Dinosaur highway' tracks dating back 166 million years are discovered in England

By BRIAN MELLEY
Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A worker digging up clay in a southern England limestone quarry noticed unusual bumps that led to the discovery of a "dinosaur highway" and nearly 200 tracks that date back 166 million years, researchers said Thursday.

The extraordinary find made after a team of more than 100 people excavated the Dewars Farm Quarry, in Oxfordshire, in June expands upon previous paleontology work in

the area and offers greater insights into the Middle Jurassic period, researchers at the universities of Oxford and Birmingham said.

"These footprints offer an extraordinary window into the lives of dinosaurs, revealing details about their movements, interactions, and the tropical environment they inhabited," said Kirsty Edgar, a micropaleontology professor at the University of Birmingham. Four of the sets of tracks that make up the so-called highway show paths taken by gigantic, long-necked,

herbivores called sauropods, thought to be Cetiosaurus, a dinosaur that grew to nearly 60 feet (18 meters) in length. A fifth set belonged to the Megalosaurus, a ferocious 9-meter predator that left a distinctive triple-claw print and was the first dinosaur to be scientifically named two centuries ago.

"Scientists have known about and been studying Megalosaurus for longer than any other dinosaur on Earth, and yet these recent discoveries prove there is still new evidence of these



In this undated photo provided by Oxford University Museum of Natural History and the University of Birmingham on Thursday, Jan. 2, 2025, a view of a dinosaur footprint uncovered on five extensive trackways that formed part of a "dinosaur highway," found at Dewars Farm Quarry, in Oxfordshire, England.

Associated Press

animals out there, waiting to be found," said Emma Nicholls, a vertebrate pa-

leontologist at the Oxford University Museum of Natural History. □

Montenegro mourns after gunman kills at least 12 people before shooting himself

By RISTO BOZOVIC

Associated Press

CETINJE, Montenegro (AP) —

Shock and dismay prevailed in Montenegro on Thursday after a gunman fatally shot 12 people, including two children, in a western town before killing himself.

At least four others were wounded in the shooting rampage in Cetinje on Wednesday that followed a bar brawl, officials said. This was the second such incident in the town in the past three years.

Hundreds gathered on Thursday evening at the main square in Cetinje for a candlelight vigil in the memory of the victims.

Police Commissioner Lazar Šćepanović described Wednesday's shooting as "one of the biggest tragedies in the history of Montenegro." He said at a news conference that the victims included seven men, three women and two children, born in 2011 and 2016.

"Most of the victims were people he knew, his closest friends and relatives," including the shooter's sister, Šćepanović said. "This criminal act wasn't planned or organized. It was unpredictable." The shooter, identified as 45-year-old Aco Martinović, killed the owner



A police officer stands guard at the scene after a shooting incident at a bar, in Cetinje, 36 kilometers (22 miles) west of Podgorica, Montenegro, Thursday, Jan. 2, 2025.

Associated Press

of the bar, the bar owner's children and his own family members, officials have said. The attacker, who first fled after the rampage, was later located and surrounded by police. He died after shooting himself in the head, police said. Residents of Cetinje, a town of some 17,000 people, were stunned and grief-stricken.

"I knew all of these people personally, also the attacker. I think when he did that, he was out of his mind," said

Vesko Milošević, a retiree from Cetinje. "What do I know, he went from place to place and killed people. It's a catastrophe."

Vanja Popović, whose relatives are among the victims, said that "we are all in shock." "How can I feel after this?" Popović said. "No one expected it. You can't even ask anyone anything."

Police had dispatched a special unit to search for the attacker in the town, which is located about 30 kilometers

(18 miles) northwest of Podgorica, the country's capital. All roads in and out of Cetinje were blocked for hours as police swarmed the streets. Police said that the shooter had died while being taken to a hospital in the capital and succumbed from the "severity of his injuries." Officials have said that the attacker was at the bar throughout the day with other guests when the brawl erupted. He then went home, brought back

a weapon and opened fire at around 5:30 p.m.

Prosecutor Andriana Nastić said Thursday that the attacker went to six locations during the shooting rampage, including the last one, where he shot himself.

Four men were killed at the bar, she said. The shooter then moved on to another location where he killed four more people, and then two children at a third site. He then went on to kill two more people at two other locations before eventually shooting himself, Nastić said. "Further investigation will determine the exact circumstances of the events," she added.

The government has declared three days of national mourning starting on Thursday, and all planned New Year's festivities have been canceled throughout the country.

Prime Minister Milojko Spajić said that the government may try to impose a total ban on weapons "because we must ask ourselves after this who should be allowed to have guns in Montenegro." The small Adriatic Sea nation, which has a population of around 620,000 people, is known for its gun culture and many people traditionally have weapons. □



A migrant carries a child through Tapachula, Chiapas state, Mexico, Thursday, Jan. 2, 2025, as part of a caravan of migrants trying to reach the U.S. border.

Associated Press

By EDGAR H. CLEMENTE

Associated Press

TAPACHULA, Mexico (AP) —

A new caravan of migrants began walking from southern Mexico on Thursday toward the U.S. border, starting out from the city of

Tapachula near the border with Guatemala.

The majority of the migrants are from Venezuela, but they also include people from Guatemala, El Salvador, Peru and Ecuador. They've said they are tired

A small caravan of migrants sets out from southern Mexico but is unlikely to reach the U.S.

of being blocked from crossing Mexico by the government.

Though previous caravans have said they intend to reach the border — something that was almost never achieved — the migrants in the new caravan appear to be less clear about where they were headed. President-elect Donald Trump has pledged to prevent migrants from entering the United States and stage mass deportations of those already in the country.

Many of the migrants said they were simply tired of being bottled up in Tapachula — a city tired of host-

ing thousands of migrants and one where they cannot find much work.

Giscarlis Colmenares, a 29-year-old from Venezuela, has been waiting for almost three months for an asylum appointment through the U.S. CBP One app.

Colmenares said her immediate goal was to reach Mexico City to find "work, so that we see whether we can get, ahead, or stay here and earn enough money to return to Venezuela." An improvised migrant camp in downtown Mexico City was already full to overflowing with migrants.

Some recognized the difficulties involved in reaching the U.S.

Douglas Ernesto, from El Salvador, trudged along with the caravan on Thursday, with his wife and 10-year-old son.

"Our goal is the United States, but if not, we'll stay in Mexico," Ernesto said, acknowledging "that getting beyond Tapachula is very difficult."

The caravan has little or no chance of making it more than a few dozen miles. In November, Mexican officials broke up two similar migrant caravans not far from Tapachula. □

Visit the island's popular cave sites!



(Oranjestad)—Among the endless sea of dark brown sand and cacti, there are two caves hidden in the outskirts of San Nicolas, in the north-eastern area of the island. These caves, The Quadirikiri cave and The Fontein Cave are open to visitors of the Arikok National Park, so if you ever decide to take an “off-road” tour in the park, be sure to visit these prehistoric caves...and be sure to bring a flashlight!

Quadirikiri Cave

Known for its two chambers accompanied by a skylight, the Quadirikiri Cave is the most popular cave among locals and tourists, as it is easy to walk through and provides great lighting for pictures.

As with all prehistoric or ancient sites, there is always a folk legend that adds to the lore and mystery of the site. The Quadirikiri cave is no different. The most well-known legend behind the cave could be considered as Aruba's first love story, as it tells the tale of the undying love between the chief's daughter and her beloved. As legend would have it, the chief disapproved of his daughter's choice of lover, as he thought him unworthy. Stubborn and filled with anger, the daughter refused to turn away her beloved.

So, the chief decided to lock her up in the Quadirikiri

Cave, in hopes that she would soon calm down and turn away her lover. Her beloved, in turn, was locked away in the Tunnel of Love (Now known as the Huliba Cave).

Through the pathways underneath the Tunnel of Love running up to the Quadirikiri cave, the two love birds found each other, and refused to let each other go. Because of their stubbornness, they both died in the Quadirikiri Cave, their ascending spirits burning two holes in the ceiling of the cave. This is why the cave has two holes through which sunlight passes through to illuminate the chamber.

Though there have been discoveries of Amerindian drawing on the wall, these have mostly been ruined by vandalism. However, the Fontein Cave further up north, provides a better glimpse in prehistoric Amerindian paintings.

Fontein Cave

Longer than the Quadirikiri Cave, the Fontein Cave contains pathways that stretch to the limestone walls further down. Here is also where prehistoric drawings can be seen. Though this cave does not have its own legend, this was speculated to have been occupied—or at least used by prehistoric Arawak settlers on the island for rituals and other spiritual

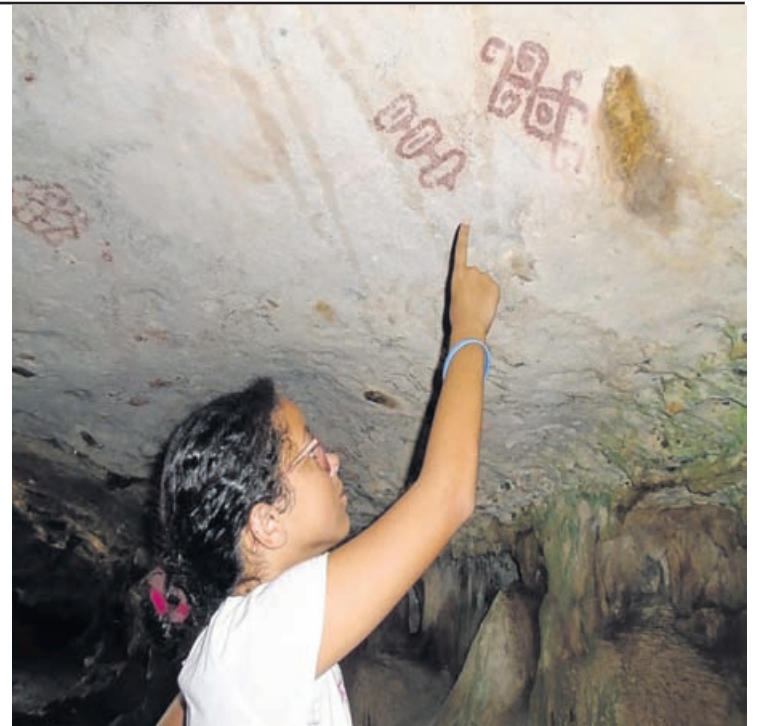
ceremonies.

The Huliba Cave/ Tunnel of Love

The Huliba Cave, formerly known as the Tunnel of Love, was once open to the public, and was the biggest and most accessible of all three caves. This cave had five chambers, including one that is heart-shaped. This cave had narrow stairs that led to long pathways deep into the cave, with a staircase leading to the exit on the other side. In one of the chambers, there used to be the carving of the Virgin Mary, put there for the protection of the cave.

However, the Huliba Cave has been permanently closed for a few years now, as a way to preserve the bat population that lives in the cave. These Long Tongue Fruit Bats and Insect Eater Bats are very important to the ecosystem of the island. Though this cave is no longer accessible to the public, it surely is interesting to learn more about the history of these caves and the Awarak tribes that resided or utilized them.

Do note that these caves are very dark, humid, hot, and are inhabited by bats. Do wear comfortable clothing and shoes, as the pathways in these caves may be rough and bumpy, and don't forget to bring a flashlight! □



Aruba: The island of Aloes



ORANJESTAD – Aloe vera, a succulent plant species, is renowned for its incredible properties for the skin. It is widely distributed and usually grows in tropical, semi-tropical and arid climates on the planet. But this plant also had a very prominent role in the history of Aruba, and its significance to the island's economy endures to this day.

The leaves of Aloe vera

contain a good amount of gel which when used topically, is great for the skin. Traditionally, Arubans use this gel to treat minor burns and other skin ailments, or just to keep skin supple and looking bright and nourished. Aside from the gel, aloe contains a bitter, yellow substance (called aloin) which is a gentle but powerful laxative, and it is also the origin of the industry of aloe in Aruba.

According to the website of Royal Aruba Aloe, Aloe vera was introduced in Aruba around 1840, when most of the island's inhabitants were farmers of little means. Dutch Governor Van Raders introduced the plant after it had been introduced in other islands of the Caribbean to cultivate and harvest the aloe to produce the laxative.

Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes."

Under Commander Jan Helenus Ferguson (1866-1871), aloe experienced a boom, which is why there is a road named after him, which goes through the aloe fields. In the 19th century, Aruba was the main supplier of aloin for laxative, which was imported abroad to the United States and Europe. The aloin from Aruba and Curaçao was known to be one of the



best in the world and was more expensive, which meant that at the time, it had significant economic

impact, particularly for the local farmers.

However, by the time the oil industry arrived on Aruba, it changed the labor market on Aruba, shifting away from agriculture. It would be after World War II that aloe would make a comeback. And eventually, as science learned about the amazing properties of aloe gel, the industry shifted from producing laxative to producing skin care. An interesting fact is that in 1951, the production of Aruban aloe amounted to around 30 percent of the total global production!

The impact and relevance of aloe is visible all around Aruba. While most homes will have a few plants for personal use and decoration, houses are also decorated with aloe motifs, and at some point, aloe even featured on post stamps. Around 1920, about two-thirds of Aruba was aloe fields, earning our island the nickname "The Island of Aloes." And in 1955, the aloe became a part of Aruba's coat of arms, symbolizing prosperity for the island. □

Images from the archive of the National Library of Aruba.

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Visit the natural bridges of Aruba!



(Oranjestad)—After you've visited the Alto Vista Church, the Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins and the mini natural pool that is located right next to it, you're next up around the northern coast line must be the Natural Bridge. Once the largest natural bridge in the Caribbean, this bridge has been a tourist attraction for many years.

The bridge was formed during thousands of years, cut and crafted by the wild waves that crash into the coral stone walls of the coast. Before its collapse, this bridge measured 30 meters in length and 7 meters in height, making it the biggest natural bridge in the Caribbean at the time. For

many years, this site was also a frequently visited beach, as the bridge had a small opening through which the water would flow into the tiny beach.

Unfortunately in 2005, the bridge collapsed, and the little beach dried up. Despite this, this site remained a tourist attraction, with many visitors walking along the coral cliffs of the bridge to see the spectacular view of the northern coastline and the Caribbean Sea. Visitors can also still visit the souvenir shop on the left of the bridge entrance.

While the natural bridge no longer is functional, there is now a smaller natural bridge very close. This bridge is often called the "Baby Bridge" or "Daughter Bridge".



ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence:

Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep

your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to

Aruba to me

use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation. Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again. For today we received a lovely message from Norma & Ron Rubin from Swampscott, MA, USA.

They wrote to us saying: "Aruba to us is magical!"

From first coming as a couple 38 years ago, to being here with our children and

their families is total joy. All 6 of our Grandchildren, ages 8-20, cannot wait to return each year. It just does not get any better than that.

To have that time together is a gift. We spend idyllic, safe, & fun times together. We are beyond lucky to be at the Costa Linda where our "Aruba Family" welcomes us and treats us like family. We thank each and everyone of you for creating such a magical place."

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers!

Blackstone Beach



(Oranjestad)—Named after its most recognizable feature, the Blackstone Beach almost represents the opposite of the typical Aruban beaches. For one, it has black sand and is covered in black smooth stones. Secondly, it lies on the northern side of the island, away from the white sandy beaches of in the southern region. So, if you feel up for something different—or if it's opposite day,

visit the Blackstone Beach.

Blackstone Beach shows the more natural side of Aruba: the stones that cover the beaches and the shape of it has been crafted for thousand years via volcanic eruptions, coral reef movements and wave activity of the rural northern part of the island. Located further east to the Natural Bridge and Andicuri Beach, the Blackstone Beach



is relatively easy to access. Once you get passed the Ayo Rock Formation, take the Andicuri road leading up to Andicuri Beach. There, you can park your car and take a 1km hike towards Blackstone Beach.

This beach forms part of the Arikok National Park and is therefore a site that is preserved. This is why it is also relatively untouched by commercial influences. Despite being called a beach, do note that it is not advised to swim in the water, as the

current is very strong and can easily stray you further in the wild ocean. However, you can still enjoy a spectacular view of the stones and the northern ocean that stretches out in front of the beach and take a picture with your friends or family! □

Create museum memories

ORANJESTAD — Museums are an integral part of conserving and honoring cultures, and Aruba is no exception. Our Island has a wide selection of various museums for our locals and visitors to see. Take this opportunity to learn about our island and experience a different day beyond the beach. Let us introduce to you these museums.

Museum of Industry Aruba

The Museum of Industry is located in San Nicolas—better known as the art capital of Aruba. This museum exhibits the industrial history of gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and tourism through elaborated displays and multimedia installations.

The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower

in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history, which began in the 19th century. The Water Tower was built in 1939 and consists of three sections: the substructure, the high-rising vertical shaft, and the tank at the top. The Water Tower was purchased by the Monuments Fund in 2003 so it can be restored and preserved as one of Aruba's monuments. The Museum of Industry is part of Aruba Museum Foundation (Fundacion Museo Aruban), which is a foundation set to maintain, preserve, and protect the Aruban cultural sector, history, and nature. The museum of Industry is open daily from 9 am till 6 pm.

For more information, check out their Facebook page

Museum of Industry Aruba.

Archaeological Museum of Aruba

The Archaeological Museum of Aruba is located at Schelpstraat 42 in downtown Oranjestad. The renovated historic Ecury complex in the area has been transformed from a family home to a modern museum that preserves Aruba's Amerindian cultural heritage. This 21st century museum is especially designed to preserve valuable artifacts dating back to the Pre-Ceramic period of 2500 BC.

In the late 1980's, AMA identified its need for an adequate housing for its collection and activities. After studying various options, a project proposal was drawn up, including the acquisition and restoration of historical buildings in downtown Oranjestad.

These historical buildings were formerly the property of the Ecury family. The "Ecury Complex", is a cluster of single and two-story historic buildings, mainly Dutch colonial architecture from the late 19th and 20th century on a plot of approximately



1.700 m2.

In 1997, the Aruban Government bought the complex for the National Archaeological Museum project. In 2004, a financial agreement was signed with the European Development Fund and in 2006, restoration and construction work began on the monumental buildings and the soon-to-be exhibition space. In December 2007, the key to the complex was delivered and the museum's employees moved to the new location. The final design for the exhibit was completed in November 2007 and the permanent exhibit, financed by the Aruban Government and the Union of Cultural Organizations (UNOCA), opened in July 2009.

At the new location, the

National Archaeological Museum Aruba disposes of approximately 500 m2 for its permanent exhibit. This exhibit conveys information on the origin and culture of the first inhabitants of the island through archaeological objects and modern exhibition techniques. The new permanent exhibit gives the visitor an insight into the cultures that inhabited the island in Pre-Historical and Early Historical times. The museum also hosts attractive public programs, including lectures, educational projects, temporary exhibits and workshops.

The museum is open daily from 9:30 am till 4:30 pm. For more information check out the Facebook page Museo Arqueologico Nacional Aruba. □



Aruba's cultural and literary development: Then and now

(Oranjestad)—The Aruban culture has seen many substantial developments over the course of a century. With the introduction of the Lago Refinery at the turn of the 20th century, followed by the breakout of the Second World War and the general incentive for political independence during the mid-century, a cultural identity on the island began to take form and have since developed through international and local influences.

In the pre-industrial era of the 19th century, much could not be said about a cultural identity on the island. Still being a part of a Dutch colonial territory at the time, as well as not having political or economic autonomy (Curacao was the center of commerce, cultural life, and political management of the Netherland Antilles at the time), the small population of Aruba consisted mostly of farmers and fishermen, tending to their crops and their cattle, or going out to fish to provide for their family. As Quito Nicolaas states in his article *Historia di Literatura Arubiano: E Bida Cultural* (Literary History of Aruba: Cultural Life), "during the pre-industrial period, there were no significant economic activity that could have created a cultural ambience, with only one way to generate profit at the time for the sub existence of Aruban families."

It wasn't until the introduction of the Lago Refinery in San Nicolas in 1928, that the island saw a small boom in cultural manifestations and entertainment, as farmers left the 'cunucu' (country) life to work in the refinery, which resulted in Aruba acquiring a different economic pillar. Before this, entertainment and cultural manifestations were mostly experienced by local parishes and the island's elite, who often partook in cultural and entertaining activities around the island, like going to the movie theater or coming together to share poetry on Sundays after church.



Literary life

Throughout the 19th century and up until the 1940s, there were also not much trace of a cultural climate for the cultural-literary sector on the island. Primary education was introduced on the island in the mid-19th century, followed by secondary and higher education around the late 30's and 40's. It wasn't until the 1950s, with the introduction of the E.R.N.A agreement in 1951 and the signing of the Statute in 1954, which allowed more space for and control over the economic and cultural development of Aruba, that the literary life on the island began to grow substantially compared to decades before. This was in response to local institutions established in the 1940s for cultural and literary growth on the island, but that did not yet capture the attention of the general public. The 1950 brought with it a boom of literary production on the island, like those of V.S. Piterrella, as well as migrant authors José Ramón Vicioso y Rings William Rufus, who have also contributed to the literary devel-

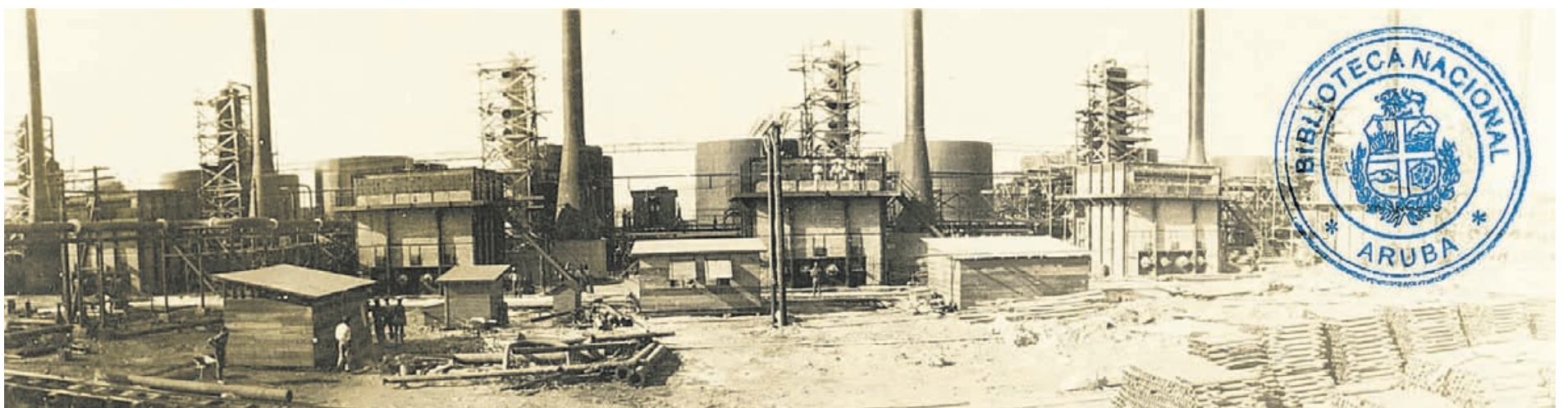
opment on the island. The literary movement was further promoted by local broadcasters Voz di Aruba and Radio Kelkboom, with their regular broadcast of literary works. The 50s and 60s also saw the influence of international cultures, especially that of the United States. During this time, because of international influences as well as the continued prosperity of the oil refinery, cultural traditions in Aruba began to really take form and become widespread, as different worldly and local concepts were introduced in the Aruban society. With the establishment of local television broadcast station Tele-Aruba in 1963, and with time and possibilities, local programs such as "Nos Tera" ("Our Land") started to pay more attention to the Aruban culture and worked to form a cultural consciousness within the community. The 1960s also saw the rise of local authors and artists, who were more comfortable in producing works in our native tongue, Papiamentu, but who also produced works in Spanish, English and Dutch. This new phenomenon

was in response to the interaction between economic growth, individual prosperity, cultural life and literary expression.

The 21st century

Nowadays, international influence on our culture is still prevalent, especially those from Latin America, the United States and The Netherlands. Nevertheless, there also exists a strong cultural identity and traditions that are exclusive to the Aruban culture, often manifesting during traditional celebrations, like Dia di San Juan/Dera Gai (St. John's Day), Dia di Himno y Bandera (National Hymn and Flag Day), Camping during Easter and much more. With the surge of social media in the last decade, artistic voices, especially those of the younger generation, has become even more prevalent and easily accessible to the community of Aruba through online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. □

Source: *Historia di Literatura Arubiano: E Bida Cultural* by J.R. "Quito" Nicolaas



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Frenzied
- 5 Pollux's twin
- 11 Fired
- 12 Some time
- 13 Sell
- 14 Grimacing, perhaps
- 15 Picnic invader
- 16 Sink problem
- 17 Poor sport's cry
- 19 Sleep attire, for short
- 22 Scalawag
- 24 Base runner's act
- 26 Taj Mahal city
- 27 Take apart
- 28 Does in
- 30 Duo quadrupled
- 31 Skirt edge
- 32 Winter coat
- 34 Idiotic
- 35 Procured
- 38 Outcry, in Britain
- 41 Spur on
- 42 Warring woman
- 43 Flight cost
- 44 Tack on
- 45 Troubling sign

DOWN

- 1 Hot flow
- 2 Farm team
- 3 Metric mass unit
- 4 Unusual
- 5 Island off Naples
- 6 Looks forward to
- 7 Galleon, e.g.
- 8 Badge material
- 9 Pamplona cry
- 10 Traffic stopper
- 16 Expected
- 18 Wharf
- 19 Five-pointed figure
- 20 Green gem
- 21 Place for a coin
- 22 Reckless
- 23 Look lewdly
- 25 Diving position
- 29 Incite
- 30 Sphere
- 33 Improve, in a way
- 34 Take a nap
- 36 Shrek, for one
- 37 New driver, usually
- 38 Pilot-policing org.
- 39 Strike caller
- 40 Grammys category
- 41 Saucer, perhaps

B	A	T	S		S	O	B	E	R
A	S	H	E	S		A	V	I	L
S	P	E	E	C	H	M	A	K	E
S	E	L		R	O	E		I	V
I	N	A	J	A	M		O	N	E
	S	W	I	P	E		P	I	N
			L	E	M	M	E		
G	R	I	T		A	I	R	E	D
L	E	N	S		K	N	A	V	E
O	C	T		L	E	I		O	P
B	O	I	L	E	R	M	A	K	E
A	D	M	I	T		A	R	E	N
L	E	E	D	S			E	D	D

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9	10
11					12					
13					14					
15					16					
		17	18					19	20	21
22	23					24	25			
26							27			
28					29		30			
31					32	33				
			34					35	36	37
38	39	40						41		
42								43		
44								45		

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-3

CRYPTOQUOTE

CW KZW WKPY XEYWZ'M
YKZUWME; CW KZW WKPY
XEYWZ'M ARMTQWMM; CW
KZW WKPY XEYWZ'M
DKFQTERNW KQN AXQN.
— FCWQNXVBQ AZXXHM
Cryptoquote: ACCEPT WHAT PEOPLE
OFFER. DRINK THEIR MILKSHAKES. TAKE THEIR
LOVE. — WALLY LAMB

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku

			6					2
		7	9					
						1	7	9
						3	1	
5	9				8			
			7		5			
9	7		1	2		5		
		4			9			
2		1	5		6	4		

Difficulty: ★★★★★

1/3

Answer to previous puzzle

6	7	3	5	2	9	4	8	1
4	9	2	8	6	1	7	5	3
8	5	1	7	4	3	9	2	6
3	2	9	4	5	6	8	1	7
1	4	7	3	8	2	5	6	9
5	8	6	9	1	7	3	4	2
7	1	5	6	9	4	2	3	8
9	6	4	2	3	8	1	7	5
2	3	8	1	7	5	6	9	4

Difficulty: ★★★

1/2

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

Supermarket hours

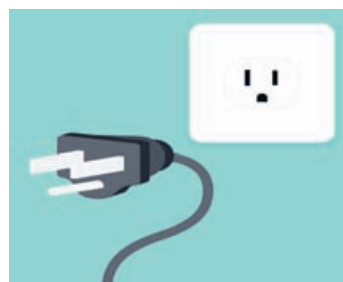


Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier, mostly around 2pm.

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

lets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Electrical power



Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of out-

Drinking water



The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Safety



Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

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Building D
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Divi Village

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Building D 1 st floor
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Room # 2118 birdie 3
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953 One bedroom week 01
room # 654
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2047
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contract Price : \$ 12,000
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Noord	527 3200
Sta. Cruz	527 2900
San Nicolas	584 5000
Police Tipline	11141
Ambulancia	911
Fire Dept.	115
Red Cross	582 2219

TAXI SERVICES

Taxi Tas	587 5900
Prof. Taxi	588 0035
Taxi D.T.S.	587 2300
Taxi Serv. Aruba	583 3232
A1 Taxi Serv.	280 2828

TRAVEL INFO

Aruba Airport	524 2424
American Airlines	582 2700
Avianca	588 0059
Jet Blue	588 2244
Surinam	582 7896

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Aruba Food Bank
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FAVI- Visually Impaired
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Alcoholics Anonymous
Tel. 736 2952
Narcotics Anonymous
Tel. 583 8989
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

Making any New Year's resolutions? Here are some tips to help make them stick

By **MARIA CHENG**
AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — As the new year dawns, so too does the opportunity for change.

Experts say January can be a good time to reflect on self-improvement, but acknowledge it takes work to make resolutions stick.

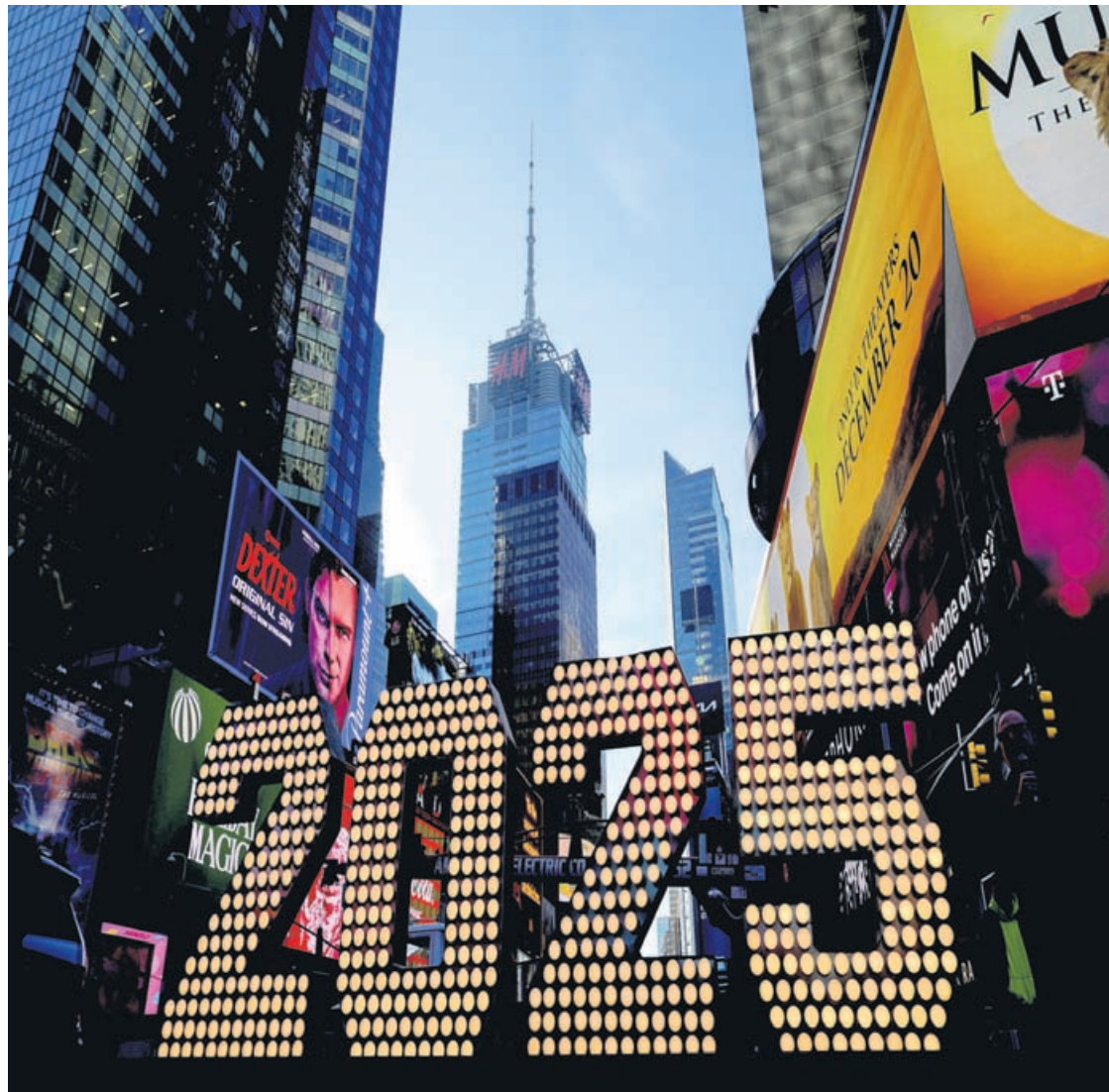
Studies have shown that up to 70% of people who make New Year's resolutions abandon those good intentions within months.

Here are some tips for how to keep those resolutions when your willpower starts to falter.

Start small

Psychologist Lynn Bufka suggests being realistic about any resolutions.

"It's quite daunting to say that you want to lose 50 pounds and thus, will never eat dessert again," she said. "It might be more helpful to say, you're only going to have dessert on the weekends and for spe-



The 2025 New Year's Eve numerals are displayed in Times Square, Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2024, in New York.

Associated Press

cial occasions."

Behavioral health experts recommend breaking ambitious goals into smaller targets, like swapping at least one snack for fruit and vegetables or getting some exercise for 10 minutes every day. Once you start hitting these smaller goals,

the bigger one might not seem so daunting.

Think positive

It's tough to make big changes. Bufka said that simply thinking more positively about what your ultimate goal is — and what you're gaining from your changed behavior — can

bolster your motivation.

"If I put money in a jar for what I would have spent on chocolate every day, that starts to add up," explained Bufka, deputy chief of research and policy at the American Psychological Association.

Focusing on what the resolution is helping you to accomplish — rather than what you're being deprived of — can be a powerful way to reframe your thinking, experts say.

Focus on goals

A study of New Year's resolutions published in 2020 found that people who focus on specific goals are more successful than those simply trying to kick bad habits.

In a group of more than 1,000 people, scientists found the most popular resolutions involved exercise, weight loss and eating habits. Other resolutions focused on self-improvement, personal finance issues and ways to focus on mental health and reduce

stress.

Among the 55% of people who said they'd kept their resolutions after one year, nearly 60% of them had made resolutions involving goals versus 47% of those focused on avoiding certain behaviors.

Enlist friends and your calendar

Involving others in your efforts, both for support and to hold yourself accountable, may also help. Someone who decides to start exercising more, for example, might find it useful to join a running group or find a gym class with friends, to make training less of a chore.

Experts also recommended scheduling time into your calendar to help you keep your resolution, like blocking off a specific period every morning or evening.

Be kind to yourself

Change is hard, so don't expect perfection. There will inevitably be times when it feels impossible to keep your resolution or you want to give up.

"A great resolution might be, 'I will be less judgmental with myself,'" said Tamara Russell of the British Psychological Society. "Research shows that the more we develop self-compassion, the more compassionate we can become towards others."

Lastly, if Jan. 1 feels like an artificial date to adopt new resolutions, make the changes on your own schedule.

Russell said it makes "no sense at all" to make resolutions pegged to the calendar year, given that winter is typically a time of hibernation for much of the natural world.

She said that spring, as a season of growth and renewal, might be a better time for most people to embrace change.

To better keep resolutions, Russell suggests reviewing each week what has and hasn't worked.

"Keep refining and don't be afraid to adjust and fine-tune what you are doing," she said. "Study your own behavior like a scientist." □

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Carter reflected on 1980 Olympic boycott: 'A bad decision'

By **EDDIE PELLIS**

AP National Writer

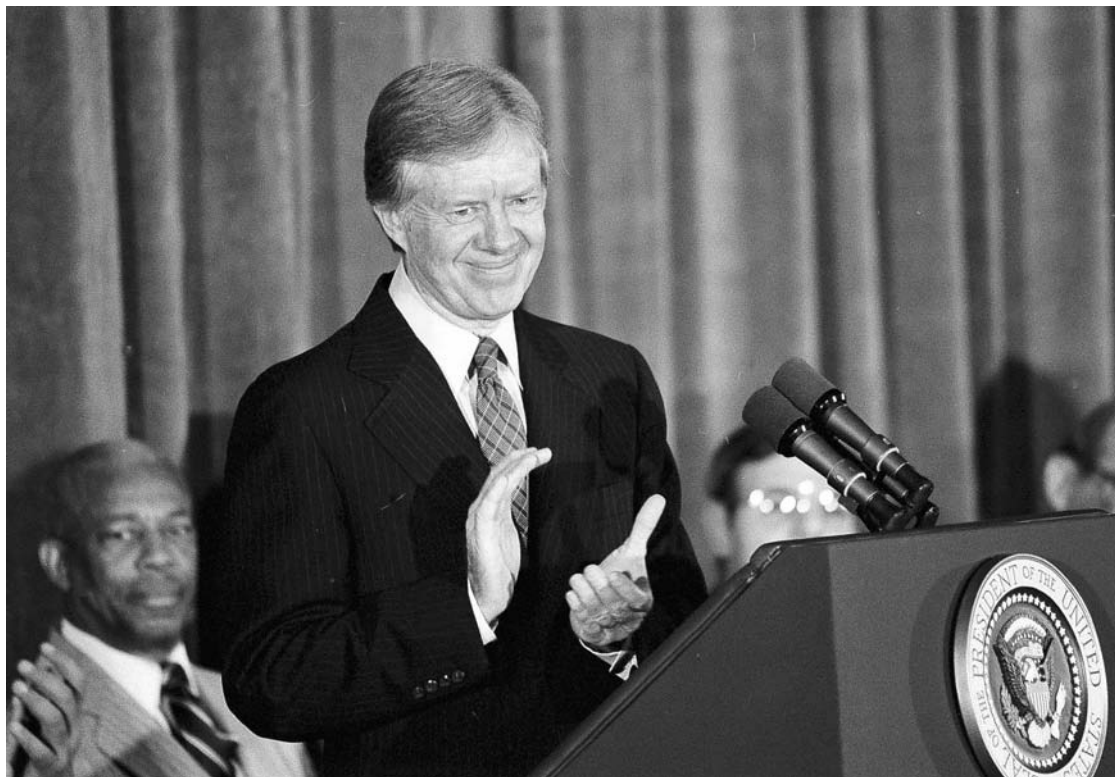
COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo.

(AP) — It was a decision that robbed hundreds of athletes of their once-in-a-lifetime chance at Olympic glory, and for more than four decades, it weighed heavily on the man who made it — Jimmy Carter.

Carter's passing Sunday has unearthed memories from his 1977-1981 presidency. Somewhere between his greatest foreign-policy success (the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt) and his greatest failure (the Iran hostage crisis) sits the U.S. boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow.

It was Carter who called for that boycott — a Cold War power play intended to express America's disdain for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In his 1980 State of the Union Address, Carter said the invasion "could pose the most serious threat to world peace since the second World War."

The boycott garnered more than two-thirds support from the 2,400 members of the unwieldy U.S. Olympic Committee house of delegates, the governing body that made the official move to keep the athletes out of Moscow. In short time, that move came to be seen as the textbook example of the risks, confusion and low success rate of injecting politics into sports. "We were not allowed to go for a not-so-clear rea-



President Jimmy Carter pauses during a speech to applaud the U.S. Olympic Committee's stand on the Moscow Olympics, Feb. 1, 1980, in Washington.

Associated Press

son," said Edwin Moses, the hurdling great who won 122 straight races between 1977 and 1987, which included the Olympic gold-medal contests in 1976 and 1984. For decades, members of the 1980 U.S. Olympic team — recognized as Olympians at home but not by the International Olympic Committee abroad — told stories about opportunities missed and dreams unfulfilled because of the trip to Moscow they never took. Of the 474 athletes who had qualified for the team in 1980, 227 would not get another chance to compete in the Olympic Games.

Many athletes told stories of meeting Carter at a White House visit in the summer of 1980 that served as a tepid substitute. In Washington, the athletes received the highest honor civilians can receive from Congress: the Congressional gold medal. But those medals were only gold-plated bronze, not pure gold, and they weren't recorded in the Congressional record until a push was made nearly three decades later. Swimmer Jesse Vassallo, a reigning world champion in multiple events at the time, told Swimming World Magazine about meeting Carter in the reception line.

Carter "reached out to shake my hand and he said 'How would you have done in Moscow?'" Vassallo recalled. "And I said, 'I would have won two golds and a silver.' And he just gave me this (pained) look. He didn't ask anybody else that question." Wrestler Jeff Blatnick, a champion on the 1984 Olympic team, met Carter on an airplane years later. According to an essay written by the late USOC spokesman Mike Moran, Blatnick said: "He looks at me and says, 'Were you on the 1980 hockey team?' I say, 'No sir, I'm a wrestler, on the summer team.' He says, 'Oh, that was a bad

decision, I'm sorry.'" In his 2021 biography on the 39th President, Kai Bird writes that the boycott was a byproduct of a hard line Carter decided to take against the Soviets at the urging of his national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who had been in a long-running struggle with the less-hawkish Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, to influence Carter's thinking. "History would prove Vance correct; Brzezinski's 'Carter Doctrine' never amounted to much more than a cover for wasteful arms exports," Bird wrote. And Carter's boycott did nothing to deter the Soviets. They stayed in Afghanistan for another nine years, while further disrupting the Olympic movement and America's own turn as an Olympic host four years later. The Soviets and 13 other countries, mostly from the Eastern Bloc, boycotted the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984 in retaliation for what the Americans had done to Moscow four years earlier. Forty-four years after Carter's fateful decision, the Olympics remain every bit as politicized and polarized as they were back then. And for the past several years, the world has grappled with Russia's place in international sports in the wake of another invasion — this time, into neighboring Ukraine. How that war is resolved will help define Russia's role when the Olympics come back to Los Angeles in 2028. □



Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo, right, goes around Indiana Pacers forward Pascal Siakam (43) during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Indianapolis, Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2024.

By **TIM REYNOLDS**

AP Basketball Writer

Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo is the early leader in fan balloting for the NBA

Associated Press

All-Star Game, and LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers seems well on his way toward extending his record and getting picked

Antetokounmpo, Jokic and James among early NBA All-Star leading vote-getters

for a 21st time. The first update on All-Star voting for this season's revised game was released Thursday, with Antetokounmpo the overall leader with about 1.7 million votes. Denver's Nikola Jokic is second overall with about 1.4 million votes, which is tops among all Western Conference players.

The 10 players on pace to be selected as starters, at least based on the fan balloting: Antetokounmpo, Boston's Jayson Tatum, New York's Karl-Anthony Towns, Char-

lotte's LaMelo Ball and Cleveland's Donovan Mitchell from the Eastern Conference, and Jokic, Phoenix's Kevin Durant, Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, Dallas' Luka Doncic and James from the West.

But there won't be 10 starters this year for the All-Star Game, set to take place Feb. 16 in San Francisco. There will be more. It's the first year of a new All-Star format, one where there will be three games. The 24 All-Stars will be drafted into three teams

of eight players apiece by TNT personalities and former NBA greats Shaquille O'Neal, Charles Barkley and Kenny Smith. Those three teams will be entered into a four-team tournament, with the remaining squad being the team of NBA rookies and second-year players that wins the Rising Stars event on All-Star Friday. There are two semifinal games, followed by the winners meeting in a championship game — with the first team to reach 40 points the winner of all three games. □

NFL Playoff Guide: Postseason bracket much clearer with 1 week remaining in regular season

By **DAVID BRANDT**
AP Sports Writer

It's Week 18 of the NFL season, which means just one more weekend remains before postseason action begins.

The two-time defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs and star quarterback Patrick Mahomes look like a formidable opponent once again and have already clinched the No. 1 seed in the AFC bracket with a 15-1 record. Over in the NFC, a crucial game awaits when the Minnesota Vikings (14-2) travel to face the Detroit Lions (14-2) on Sunday in a game that will decide the division winner, the No. 1 seed in the conference and home-field advantage until the Super Bowl.

Here are some more things to watch as the regular season winds down:

NFL playoff picture

AFC

Six of the seven spots in the playoff bracket are secure, though the seeding is still up for grabs in some situations. The Chiefs are the top seed while the Buffalo Bills (13-3) own the No. 2 spot. The Baltimore Ravens (11-5), Pittsburgh Steelers (10-6), Los Angeles Chargers (10-6) and Houston Texans (9-7) also know they have more football to play. The Ravens can clinch the No. 3 spot in the bracket with



Philadelphia Eagles running back Saquon Barkley (26) runs the ball against the Dallas Cowboys during the second half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 29, 2024, in Philadelphia.

Associated Press

a win over the Browns. The Texans are locked into the No. 4 spot despite a worse record than some teams because they've clinched their division.

As for the seventh team, the Denver Broncos (9-7) are in good position though the Miami Dolphins (8-8) and Cincinnati Bengals (8-8) still have hope. The problem for the Dolphins and Bengals is the Broncos can earn the final spot with a win against Kansas City this weekend, and there's not much incentive for the Chiefs to play their starters considering they've already got the No. 1 seed

wrapped up.

NFC

Much like the AFC, six of the seven spots are taken. The Vikings, Lions, Philadelphia Eagles (13-3), Green Bay Packers (11-5), Los Angeles Rams (10-6) and Washington Commanders (11-5) will be in the bracket. Minnesota and Detroit will duke it out for the No. 1 seed next Sunday while the loser falls all the way to No. 5. The Eagles have secured the No. 2 spot.

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers (9-7) have the inside track for the final spot, needing a win over the New Orleans Saints this weekend to se-

cure their place. If they lose, the Atlanta Falcons (8-8) could still sneak into the bracket if they beat the Carolina Panthers.

NFL playoff format

The 14-team bracket enters its fifth season after debuting during the 2020 season. Seven teams advance to the postseason from both the AFC and the NFC.

The four division winners in each conference earn the top four seeds, ranked by their records. The last three teams are all wild-card selections, also ranked by record.

The format means the No. 1 seed in each conference

is very important because it guarantees a wild card round bye and homefield advantage until the Super Bowl. For the other 12 teams in the opening round, the No. 7 seed travels to the No. 2 seed, No. 6 goes to No. 3 and No. 5 travels to No. 4.

NFL playoff schedule

Jan. 11-13: Wild Card Round. Two games on Saturday, three on Sunday, one on Monday.

Jan. 18-19: Divisional Round. Two games on Saturday, two on Sunday.

Jan. 26: AFC and NFC Conference Championships.

Feb. 9: Super Bowl LIX at the Superdome in New Orleans.

NFL playoff betting odds

According to BetMGM Sportsbook, the Chiefs are the favorites to win the Super Bowl at +375. The Lions are right behind them at +400 while the Bills are third at +550.

Recent NFL news

Pro Bowl roster include 9 Ravens, 7 Lions, 6 Vikings and Eagles and no Mahomes

Eagles coach Nick Sirianni set to rest Saquon Barkley in finale, ending shot at NFL rushing record

Bills offense sets the table with 'everybody eats' approach

Broncos insist they don't care who sits out for Chiefs as Denver seeks to end playoff drought. □



Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes (15) passes against the Pittsburgh Steelers during the first half of an NFL football game, Wednesday, Dec. 25, 2024, in Pittsburgh.

Associated Press

By **ROB MAADDI**
AP Pro Football Writer

Nine Baltimore Ravens, including two-time NFL MVP Lamar Jackson and Derrick

Henry, were selected for the Pro Bowl Games.

The Detroit Lions are next with seven players and the Minnesota Vikings and Phila-

Pro Bowl rosters include 9 Ravens, 7 Lions, 6 Vikings and Eagles and no Patrick Mahomes

delphia Eagles each have six players on the NFC roster. Patrick Mahomes wasn't selected to the AFC roster for the first time since becoming Kansas City's starting quarterback in his second season. Mahomes, a three-time Super Bowl MVP and six-time Pro Bowl pick, wasn't among five Chiefs chosen. Teammate Travis Kelce made it for the 10th time.

Washington's Jayden Daniels is just the fourth rookie quarterback since 1970 selected to the initial Pro Bowl roster.

Raiders tight end Brock Bowers and Rams outside linebacker Jared Verse are the other rookies among 24 players chosen for the first time. Detroit's Jared Goff is the NFC's starting quarterback and Minnesota's Sam Darnold also made the team. The AFC's starting quarterback is Buffalo's Josh Allen. Jackson and Cincinnati's Joe Burrow are the backups.

Philadelphia's Saquon Barkley, who became the ninth player to rush for 2,000 yards, is the NFC's starting running

back. San Francisco's Kyle Juszczyk was selected to his ninth Pro Bowl, the most ever by a fullback. Indianapolis' Quenton Nelson is the third offensive lineman since 1970 to be selected to the Pro Bowl in each of his first seven career seasons.

Cincinnati's Ja'Marr Chase is the fourth wide receiver to be selected in each of his first four seasons. Dallas' Micah Parsons is the first defensive player chosen in each of his first four seasons since Aaron Donald went to 10 straight. □